

Dear Friend:

Now that the 80th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature has ended, I want to take this opportunity to give you an extensive report on legislation I am proud to have passed. We addressed a number of important issues including:

- Fighting to end genocide in Sudan
- Making college more affordable
- Improving access to affordable and quality health care for Texas children and adults
- Helping to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Improving our environment
- Securing funding for Texas Southern University and Prairie View A&M University
- Helping low income Texas cope with the rising costs of energy
- Creating a more fair and just criminal justice system
- Protecting our constitutional right to vote, and
- Creating opportunities for more Texans to own their first home.

We also worked tirelessly in other areas to advance issues and move the debate forward in many other areas. These issues include increasing the state minimum wage, fully funding TEXAS Grants, passing the statewide smoking ban, ensuring healthcare coverage for those with mental illnesses, securing reliable and affordable energy alternatives, increasing stem cell research, protecting the freedom of the press and supporting our troops' families.

Taking a Stand Against Genocide

Of all of the bills and all of the issues I worked on this session

nothing makes me more proud than the passage of "Stop the Genocide Act." This historic legislation was signed into law by the Governor on June 21 at the Houston Holocaust Museum.

Working closely with Senator Florence Shapiro (R-Plano), Representative Corbin Van Arsdale (R-Houston) and dozens of other committed legislators, the new law will require state pension funds to divest from companies doing business in Sudan. The targeted divestment approach will maximize the impact on the Sudanese government while minimizing harm to the Sudanese civilians and investment returns.

According to the Sudan Divestment Task Force, over the past four years, the Sudanese government and their allied organizations have killed more than 400,000 people and displaced more than 2.5 million in Sudan's Darfur region. The U.S. government has already declared these ongoing atrocities to be genocide. The U.N. has declared the crisis the "worst humanitarian disaster in the world today."

I believe with all my heart that this historic legislation will make a real difference. The state of Texas has taken a strong stand against genocide and we have sent a message to the world that we will not tolerate turning a profit on genocide.

TEXAS Grants -- We need to do more to open the door to college

To open the doors of college to more young Texans, I authored legislation in 1999 that created the TEXAS Grants program. TEXAS Grants provides tuition and fees to students who have taken the *Advanced* or *Recommended* curriculum in high school. By every account, the program has been a runaway success.

In 2000, the first year of the program, nearly 11,000 students received a TEXAS Grant to pay for college; by 2002 68,178

students received a TEXAS Grant -- every eligible student. Unfortunately, frozen funding beginning in 2003 and the devastating impact of tuition deregulation has left more and more students on the sideline.

In 2003, we faced a \$10 billion budget shortfall and had to make some very difficult cuts. During the worst of times, we asked Texans to sacrifice but we also sacrificed some people. We made a promise that, when the economy improved, we would restore those cuts and build a stronger foundation for Texas families.

Last month, with a \$14 billion surplus, the legislature passed a \$150 billion budget, but we still have still not brought the TEXAS Grant program back to where they should be. We are still sacrificing middle class and low-income Texans in the best of times.

Now, we did make some progress. We did increase TEXAS Grant funding from \$334 million to \$427 million, and more than 35,000 additional students will receive aid to go to college. But, despite those increases, fewer students will receive a TEXAS Grant next year than received a TEXAS Grant in 2002. That is just not acceptable to me. I think we could have done a lot better.

Next session I will continue to push for full funding of the TEXAS Grants program to ensure that every eligible student, every child who is working hard and playing by the rules gets what we promised them.

Ending Tuition Deregulation

One of the biggest factors contributing to the dwindling number of TEXAS Grants (not to mention the virtual elimination of the Texas Tomorrow Fund) is the skyrocketing cost of college tuition. Since 2003, when tuition deregulation was passed, tuition has increased by 80 percent, with no end in sight. It is simple math: if tuition